DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 213 049 CS 206 775

AUTHOR Ching, Marvin K. L.
TITLE Helping Students to Find the Proper Connective: Why the Difficulty.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (33rd, San Francisco, CA, March 18-20, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cohesion (Written Composition); *Connected Discourse; *Form Classes (Languages); Higher Education; Resource Materials; *Sentence Combining; *Syntax; Teaching Methods; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Connectives (Grammar)

ABSTRACT

Teachers are often baffled by the inability of a number of basic writing students to use the proper connective to show relationship between sentences or phrases for coherence. Most frustrating is the teacher's inadequacy in giving definitions or explanations beyond the student's textbook descriptions of the connectives. However, a cursory examination of the linguistic literature concerning the semantic and syntactic uses of connectives often reveals subtle, intricate, and intriguing relationships among the meanings of a connective as well as interesting interrelationships among various connectives themselves. Teachers should also make use of the psycholinguistic information concerning the developmental principles in acquiring various connectives. Effective combining of sentences demands fuller knowledge of (1) the grammatical system of English, (2) the deletion rules to produce more economical sentences, and (3) the punctuation that can take the place of connectors. Clearly, current student handbooks, rhetoric texts, and sentence combining books could present much more thoroughly the semantic and syntactic operations of connectors. (HOD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Marvin K. L. Ching
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED213049

Helping Students to Find the Proper Connective: Why the Difficulty

Marvin K. L. Ching

Baffling to teachers is the inability of a number of basic writing students to use the proper connective—a conjunction, a conjunctive adverb, or a transitional expression—to show relationship between sentences or phrases for coherence. A student, for example, may use the conjunction but when the context clearly demands and. Even more enigmatic, however, are explanations we as teachers give for these connectors: meanings which seem satisfactory and demonstrably plain to us, but confusing and inadequate to the student, as evidenced in the student's inability to select the proper connective after our teaching the differences among the connectors. We present the traditional classification of connectors from the students' textbook, which explains the meaning or function of the connectors by subsuming them under headings like Addition, Contrast, Comparison, Condition, Concession, Example, Cause, Effect, Time, Place, and Summary, but this explanation of the connectors often lacks efficacy in solving the student's lack of understanding of the meaning and use of connectors. Most frustrating is our inadequacy to give definitions or explanations beyond these textbook descriptions of the connectives. Like the primary colors we find that these explanations consist of terms so fundamental that they hardly can be explained in any other way. For example, after saying that but shows contrast, what else can we say? And even more difficult to explain is the term Concession to explain the subordinating conjunctions though and although because the dictionary meanings of concession, 'yielding' and 'submitting' do not really illuminate the semantic relation of these conjunctions with the main clause to which they are attached.

CS206775

However, a cursory examination of the linguistic literature concerning the semantic and syntactic uses of connectives often reveals subtle, intricate, and intriguing relationships among the meanings of a connective as well as interesting semantic and syntactic interrelationships among various connectives—relationships all too little understood by the classroom teacher. We as teachers use these connectives properly because of our tacit or intuitive understanding of the semantic and syntactic system of the connectives—not because of explicit textbook explanations which we give to students. The problem is therefore not teaching far enough the grammatical system of English, causing confusion in the student's mind: a problem which is one of the major themes of Mina P. Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing for the causes of errors by basic writing students.

Take the coordinating conjunction but, frequently described as showing contrast or some surprise or denial of expectation. What exactly is the nature of the contrast? For one use of but, the second main clause states in positive terms the negated idea in the first main clause:[1]

> Sally didn't treat her customers rudely, but she handled each person with diplomacy.

The same idea is stated two times: negatively in the first clause and positively in the second. Unlike other uses of but, the connectives yet or nevertheless cannot substitute for but; however, instead, or on the contrary can replace the conjunction (Quirk et al., p. 565).

In another use of but, the contrast is sometimes between a negated assertion that an item belongs to a certain class and a following positive assertion that it belongs to a higher class: "Pluto is not a horse but an animal."[2] The converse does not hold: "Pluto is not an

animal but a horse" (Abraham, p. 113).

In one use of but, Abraham points out how the contrast produced by the second clause is some compensating notion or effect which takes a dominant relationship over the idea of the first clause: "He is short of breath, but (to make up for that/to compensate for that) he has very long legs" (Abraham, p. 113). In other languages there is a separate conjunction—for example, dafür in German—to emphasize the idea in the second clause for this very function (Abraham, p. 112).

Sometimes the contrast is an outright antonymous relationship: "John is diligent in doing homework, but Bill is indolent in doing his assignments." At times the contrast shows the implicit understanding of an understood premise: "Mr. Jones is a Scotchman, but he is generous." The tertium comparationis is that Scotch are stingy, not generous (Abraham, p. 104). Still yet, the contrast may be a concession to the assertion in the first clause, but also an extension of the idea applying to another person, thing, or idea in the next clause: "John is rich, but Bill is rich too" (Abraham, p. 106).

On the other hand, when the semantic contrast is clearly contradictory—"John is intelligent, but he [John] is stupid"—the reader overcomes the contradiction by assuming that John is intelligent in some ways but stupid in other areas. There is clearly a means to overcome the literal semantic opposition so that the sentence is not nonsensical but a paradox with meaning (Abraham, pp. 105, 106).

Except for the very first use of but described above where the second clause is an affirmative restatement of the negated idea in the first clause, there is a "yes . . . but" relationship: a concession to some notion that is true, but a denial of expectation of the outcome of

that idea. The coordinating conjunction but should therefore not only be placed under the heading of Contrast, but also under Concession, a fact not recognized by existing textbooks for students. Hence textbooks tend not to show how one of the clauses joined by but may be subordinated with though or although. For instance, "It was raining, but he went out" may be rewritten as "Although it was raining, he went out," or "Although he went out, it was raining." Such options are rarely explained to the writer, nor are the semantic implications of such choices explained. When the subordinating conjunction is used, the subordinate clause is the matter which is presupposed, and the main clause is what is asserted. When the coordinating conjunction is employed, the content in both clauses is asserted (Quirk, et al., p. 528).

Surely an understanding of the intricate relationships of the meaning of the word but and the subtle semantic and syntactic relationship of this coordinating conjunction with other connectives should help teachers to be more sympathetic with students who use but inappropriately. As borne out in the literature of psycholinguistics, but is more difficult to understand than and. Writers took more time to insert but than and in blanks of sentences when these words were used appropriately.[3] The reason, according to psycholinguists, is that the word means and, but also not, an inherent negative notion, adding an extra semantic procedure in interpretation. Thus, "Max is old and handsome" is easier to process than "Max is old but handsome" because the latter sentence means both oldness and handsomeness, but also the idea that ordinarily oldness should not be related to handsomeness (Clark and Clark, p. 456).

Similarly, an examination of the linguistic literature concerning and shows a variety of meanings for and, though this conjunction is usually

subsumed under the connectives of Addition. Besides the logician's idea of mere addition, the ideas connected by and at times show simultaneous action so that the two main clauses can be interchanged:[4] "He stamped his foot and he clapped (at the same time)" can be rewritten as "He clapped and he stamped his foot." At other times, the second clause indicates subsequent action so that the two main clauses cannot be switched: "John got up and he left" cannot be transformed into "John left and he got up" (Clark and Clark, p. 129).

When the second clause shows subsequent action, the first clause may be considered an assertion which becomes a presupposition for the second clause. For example, in "It is raining and it will not stop raining until tomorrow," the presupposition of the second clause is the first clause, explaining the oddity of the reversal of the clauses in "It will not stop raining until tomorrow and it is raining."[5] Similarly, "They married and had many children" is different in meaning from "They had many children and married" because the first clause is treated as occurring first in time and becomes the presupposition of the second clause.[6] The conjunction and is therefore related to the connectives and then, then, and after.

But besides Addition, and can show Causality—"He was obstreperous in his behavior toward his superiors, and he was fired"—so that the two main clauses may be connected either by placing because at the beginning of the first clause and making the second clause the resultant clause or by replacing and with the conjunctive adverb consequently. Even Contrast—"John loved history and his brother hated the same subject—and Condition—"Do your chores and you will be rewarded"—are meanings of the conjunction and. In Contrast, and is related to but, though, and although; in Condition, to if or unless (Quirk et al., p. 561).

Bloom et al.'s study of four children from two to three years of age showed a developmental order in acquiring these varied meanings of and: the additive meaning was acquired first; the temporal meaning, second; the causal meaning, fourth; and the adversative meaning, last.[7] Even the meanings of and, apparently, are not acquired all at once. Other syntactic connectives, Bloom found, were learned subsequently (Bloom, p. 255).

Other meanings of and include summation and an incremental or climactic effect (Quirk et al., p. 661). Its summarizing function may be expressed by transitional expressions as options to the writer—by phrases like in short, in summary, in conclusion; its meaning of incremental or climactic effect, by moreover or above all.

A thorough knowledge of how and and but operate, however, also requires knowing which connectors can combine with and and but and how many clauses these two conjunctions can link. With and, for example, one may say and then, and still, and yet; with but, one may use but then, but still, but nevertheless (Quirk et al., p. 529). And in linking clauses, and can link more than two clauses; but can only join two clauses (Quirk et al., 557). However, in units larger than the sentence—in a piece of discourse—both and and but not only can start a sentence, but they can also begin the last sentence of a paragraph and link all previous sentences, not just the immediately preceding sentence (Quirk et al., p. 551).

Complete grounding in the meaning and use of the conjunctions and and but should thus lead not only to correct, but also to effective, use of these words.

Teachers, curriculum designers, and textbook writers should also make use of the psycholinguistic information concerning the developmental principles in acquiring various connectives. For instance, when teaching

combining of clauses with the subordinating conjunctions after and before, lesson makers should be aware of the order-of-mention principle that young children employ to process clauses joined by before and after. Often children confuse order of mention in the sentence with the semantic order of occurrence of events of the sentence (Clark and Clark, pp. 358, 359). Young children, for example, will show 93% of the time an understanding of these sentences because of the order-of-mention principle:

1. The boy patted the dog before he kicked the rock.
2. After the boy patted the dog, he kicked the rock.

(Clark and Clark, p. 359)

But they will demonstrate only 18% of the time an understanding of the following sentences because of the mismatch between order of mention and the temporal meaning:

1. Before the boy kicked the rock, he patted the dog.
2. The boy kicked the rock after he patted the dog.

(Clark and Clark, p. 359)

Preserving the actual order of events may therefore be tried first, although Coker has found that some children rely on a main clause strategy—interpreting whatever appears in the main clause as first in occurrence, as in the sentence "Before Ellie waved the flag, she pushed the boat."[8] This sentence proved to be no trouble to some children despite the violation of the order-of-mention principle because they tended to interpret the main clause as occurring first in time.

Although it may be natural to express effect and then the cause for English, children speaking another language, such as an Indo-Chinese language, require expression of the cause first and then the effect, a strategy much like the order-of-mention principle strategy that English speaking children use in interpreting after and before clauses: first comes the cause and

then the effect.[9] Helping children to understand and to combine sentences with connectives must thus take into account the primary language of the student if the student speaks English as a second language.

Loban's studies revealed that adverbial clauses of time, cause, and condition are common in both speech and writing of secondary students, but that less common adverbial clauses of consequence (never defined by the author) or concession (clauses beginning with <u>though</u> and <u>although</u>) were used more frequently by his high group in speaking, and clauses of concession were used more frequently in writing by this high ability group.[10] Watts' study of children of Great Britain also confirms the difficulty of using the word <u>although</u> correctly in tasks calling for the completion of an adverbial clause starting with <u>although</u>. The response to <u>although</u> items showed that not until the age of nine could children do 50% of the sentences with <u>although</u> correctly, and not until the age of 15 could students produce about 75% of the sentences correctly in sentences like these below:

1. I had my bath yesterday, although . . .
2. Mary played in the street, although . . .[11]

Loban states that somehow the difficulty lies in the semantic opposition of the adverbial clause to the main statement (Loban, p. 57).

Some important semantic facts and syntactic operations of conjunctions which have not been discussed and which are not frequently discussed in student textbooks appear in the chart on p. p.___, a summary from my examination of linguistic literature concerning conjunctions and other connectors.

Information Frequently Not Discussed in Student Textbooks

Type of Conjunction	Specific Conjunction	Meaning	Syntactic Relative or Equivalent	Syntactic Operation
Coordinating	or	Alternative Different kinds of alternatives Exclusive meaning Inclusive meaning Restatement, correction, or reformulation (Quirk et al.,p. 564) Condition (as in "Be careful or you'll break your arm.") (Clark and Clark, pp. 129, 130)	either-or both-and in other words, that is if . . . not; the conditional meaning of and discussed in this paper	Can begin a sentence; can join more than one clause; can begin the last sentence in a piece of discourse (Quirk et al., pp. 557, 561)
	nor	and + not Means something previously negated Used for addition and/or reinforcement of negative ideas (Quirk et al., p. 565)	and . . . not	Inversion of subject-auxiliary verb needed Concludes a series of negatives whether in a sentence or a piece of discourse with no chances for addition (unlike neither, which leaves a series open for negative addition) (Quirk et al., p. 662)

Information Frequently Not Discussed in Student Textbooks

Type of Conjunction	Specific Conjunction	Meaning	Syntactic Relative or Equivalent	Syntactic Operation
Coordinating	not only but also	Often a surprising and dramatic meaning emphasized, particularly of the second clause, and also of the first clause if there is subject-auxiliary verb inversion..... (Quirk et al., p. 68)	both . . . and	Optional inversion of subject-auxiliary verb of first clause for dramatic effect
Subordinating	if	Conditional meaning Counterfactual (e.g., "If I had known . . .) Fulfilment impossible of main clause Indicative If . . . then If . . . it might be the case that Only if . . . then ..... In these three types of indicative conditionals, fulfilment of the main clause is open or possible, and there is a cause-effect relationship between the conditional clause and the main clause. (Barker, pp. 144, 146)[12] Both conditional and concessive meanings: even if..... (Quirk et al., pp. 746, 749) (Barker, p. 146)	unless , provided that (Unless = 'only if not') (Quirk et al., p. 746) though, although	
	unless	only if . . . not..... e.g., "Twain liked people unless they were hypocrites" means "Twain liked people only if they were not hypocrites." (Clark and Clark, p. 457)	only if . . . not	

Information Frequently Not Discussed in Student Textbooks

Type of Conjunction	Specific Conjunction	Meaning	Syntactic Relative or Equivalent	Syntactic Operation
Subordinating	so that	Result	because parallel e.g., "Because he was careless, he was caught" vs. "He was careless so that he was caught." (Quirk et al., pp. 554, 774)	Follows and cannot precede main clause (e.g., "She was careless so that she was caught," not "So that she was caught, she was careless." (Quirk et al., pp. 554, 774)
		Purpose	in order that	May either follow or precede main clause (e.g., "She worked hard so that she could win" or "So that she could win, she worked hard."

But effective combining of sentences also demands fuller knowledge of the grammatical system of English. It requires knowledge of deletion rules to produce more economical sentences. For example, "Although he was sending in his entry late, he was confident that he would be awarded the prize" may be expressed as "Although sending in his entry late, he was confident that he would be awarded the prize." It also requires learning preposition parallels of various conjunctions for concision: because of for because; in spite of or despite for though, although, and but (Colson, p. 36). In addition, understanding grammar involves knowing what grammatical constructions without a conjunction can replace various constructions with a conjunction. For instance, the following sentences are all constructions which do not use the conditional if, but all have a conditional meaning:

1. Had I been present, I would have helped you.
2. Were it true that you had lied, you would have been most sorry.
3. Should the woman decide to take the job, her employer would be most happy.

(Quirk et al., p. 746)

And certainly, effective combining of sentences requires a knowledge of how punctuation can take the place of connectors. For example, little do books elborate on how the colon can signify exemplification, particularization, reformulation, or summation so that it can take the place of conjunctive adverbs like for instance or for example; in particular; in other words; or in short, in summary, or in conclusion.

Clearly, current student handbooks, rhetorics, and sentence-combining books can present much more thoroughly the semantic and syntactic operations of connectors for basic writers: operations which we as teachers have fully internalized but which we have not explicitly and fully explained to our basic writing students struggling to find the proper connective.

Notes

[1]Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik, A Grammar of Contemporary English (New York: Seminar Free Press, 1972), p. 565.

[2]Werner Abraham, "But," Studia Linguistica, 33, No. 2 (1979), 93.

[3]Herbert H. Clark and Eve V. Clark, Psychology and Language: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977), p. 456.

[4]Elizabeth Closs Traugott, "On the Expression of Spatio-Temporal Relations in Language," in Universals of Human Language, ed. Joseph H. Greenberg, Charles A. Ferguson, and Edith A. Moravcsik, III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), p.387.

[5]Traugott Schiebe, "On Presuppositions in Complex Sentences," Syntax and Semantics, 11 (1979), 127, 130.

[6]Jacques Colson, "Causals: A Case for a Pragmatic Approach of Conjunctions," in Mélanges de Linguistique et de Littérature: Offerts au Professeur Henri Draye à l'Occasion de Son Emeritat, ed. Jacques Lerot and Rudolf Kern, Université de Louvain Recueil de Travaux d'Historique et de Philologie, 6e Série, Fascicule 14 (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Universite, Bureau du Recueil, 1978), p. 23.

[7]Lois Bloom, Margaret Lahey, Lois Hood, Karen Lifter, and Kathleen Fiess, "Complex Sentences: Acquisition of Syntactic Connectives and the Semantic Relations They Encode," Journal of Child Language, 7 (1980), 235-255.

[8]Pamela L. Coker, "Syntactic and Semantic Factors in the Acquisition of Before and After," Journal of Child Language, 5 (1978), p. 262.

[9]Chauncey Chu, "Words and Parts of Speech," Lecture to TESL Class, Memphis State University, Memphis, 16 June 1981.

[10]A. F. Watts, The Language and Mental Development of Children: An Essay in Educational Psychology (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1944), pp. 82, 83.

John A. Barker, "Indicative Conditionals," Studies in Language, 3 (1979), p. 146.

Memphis State University
Memphis, Tennessee